

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**HEALTH PORTFOLIO**

**Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017**

**Ref No:** SQ17-000168

**OUTCOME:** 2 - Health Access and Support Services

**Topic:** Community Mental Health Program

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Siewert, Rachel

**Question:**

I stated at the hearing, 'I have had reports that there are a number of PHNs that are substituting nonclinical workers who do not have mental-health qualifications.' I have also had reports of this being implemented even for people who have recently been discharged from hospital after attempting suicide and these people may be referred to someone who has no clinical mental health qualification or training. What is the Department doing to ensure quality of care is not compromised in favour of providing more services at reduced quality by using unqualified, non-clinical workers?

**Answer:**

Low-intensity services can be provided through a range of mechanisms ranging from brief forms of treatment or group treatments by mental health professionals through to use of individuals with appropriate competencies who do not meet requirements for registration or recognition as a mental health professional (eg. New Access coaches or peer workforce).

PHNs are expected to play a key role in supporting workforce planning, retention and development activities matched to the population health needs within their respective regions. PHNs are encouraged to make best use of the existing workforce to ensure a flexible approach to mental health service delivery within a stepped care approach.

The Australian Government supports the work of the Safety and Quality Partnership Standing Committee (SQPSC) that reports to the Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol Principal Committee (MHDAPC) of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC). The key national standards in place to support quality of care in mental health service delivery and workforce standards are the National Standards for Mental Health Services (2010) ('the Standards'). The Standards aim to assist all mental health services to provide quality care that is evidence based, integrated, and recovery-focused. The Standards provide a blueprint for new and existing services to guide quality improvement and service enhancement activities. Individual Guidelines for implementation of the Standards are available for public mental health services and private hospitals; non-government community services; and private office based mental health practices.